

Dream Jobs: Digital artist

By Deborah Todd, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.07.17

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Sam Wirch stands in front of the Yoda fountain statue at Lucasfilm, where he works. Photo from: Sam Wirch

Sam Wirch is a digital artist. He works at a company called Lucasfilm. This company is in San Francisco, California. It makes special effects for movies.

Mr. Wirch does his art in a computer program. He uses it to make background pictures and objects. These appear in movies. They were made with a computer. Yet they look real on the screen.

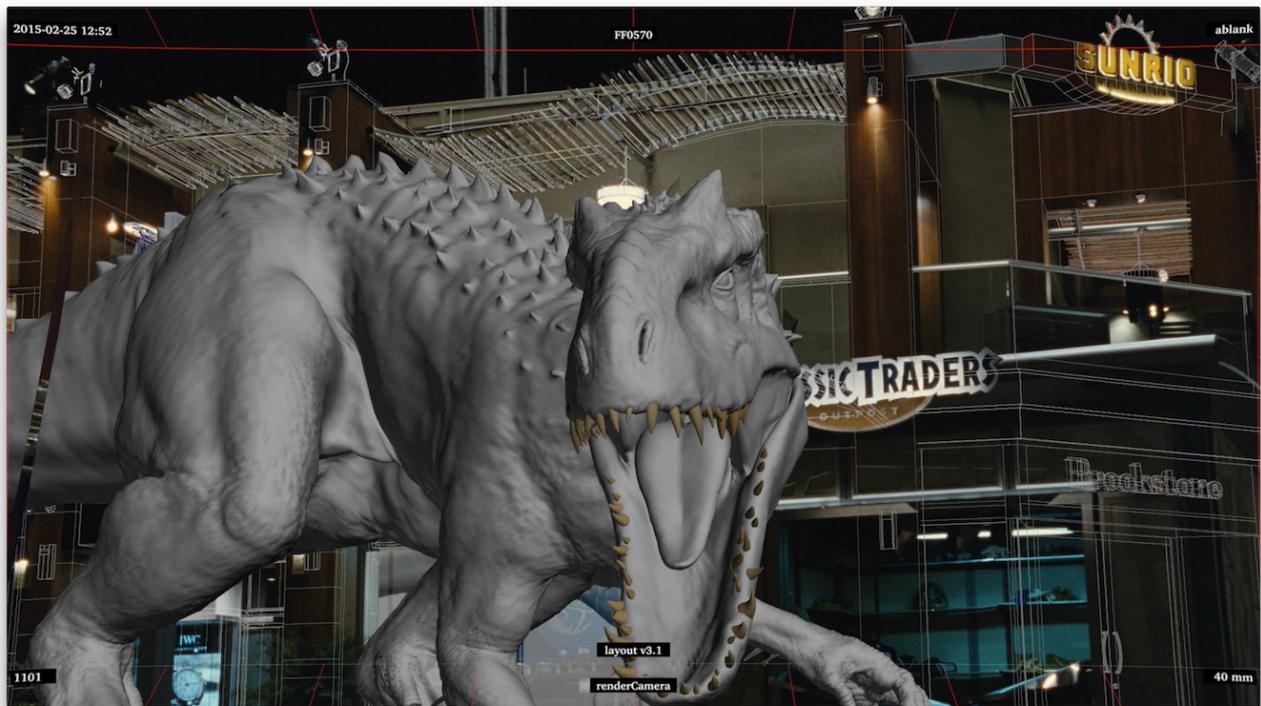
Newsela asked Mr. Wirch a few questions about his job.

What is your job?

I make digital models. A digital model is a kind of artwork. We make it on a computer. It is then added to the movie. It could be a building. It could be a character, like a monster or dinosaur. Or, it could be a spaceship. Digital models can be anything at all.

To make it, we start with a basic shape. We put in the right colors. Then we make it the right size and texture. My job is to make it look real.

It is kind of like working with clay. The difference is, you are using a computer. You push and pull the model in the computer program. This is how you get it to look the way you want.



Can you give an example?

I worked on the movie "Jurassic World." It is about a dinosaur theme park. The director filmed the actors. He did not film any dinosaurs, of course!

To make the dinosaurs, the director sent the movie to Lucasfilm. We used computers to make dinosaurs. My job was to make the dinosaur move. It had to react to the real actors. It also had to look real.

**When did you first become interested in digital art?**

I took a computer art class in high school. That is when I started learning animation, like cartoons. I loved it. I continued working on it during college. Then I took a position at an animation company. I learned a lot there. That is when I was sure this is what I wanted to do for a career.

What did you study in college?

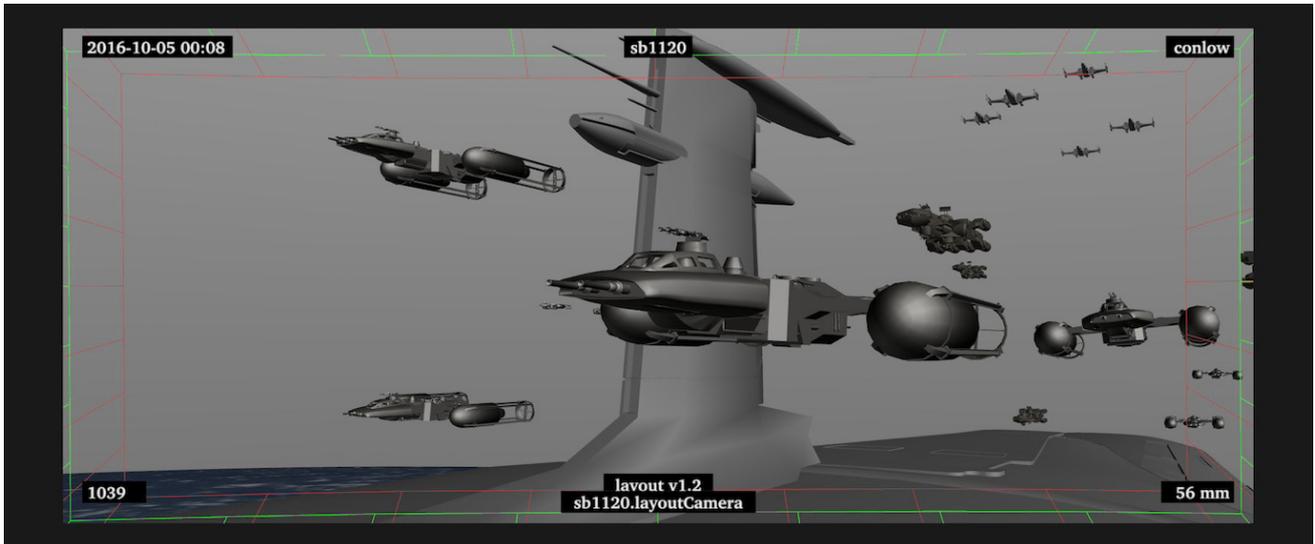
I studied art. I also studied computer science.

What do you look forward to about your day? Is there anything you do not look forward to?

At Lucasfilm, there are many movie theaters! Every day, my coworkers and I go to a theater. We show what we are working on.

We all work together. I learn a lot from the other artists. I learn from my bosses, too.

It is so fun to see movies come together. There is not a lot I do not like about my job.



What are you most proud of about your job?

It makes me proud to add my ideas to a movie. Seeing my name in the credits also makes me proud.

What is something important you have learned from your coworkers?

Usually, artists spend a long time working on a short part of a film. The part may be only a few seconds long. But it starts to seem very important. It is easy to get wrapped up in it and feel overwhelmed. Sometimes, this tiny part is not as important as the whole movie. My coworkers help me remember that. They say, "Let us take a step back. What is the really important part of this?"



What can kids who want to take the same career path as you start doing now to prepare?

Explore and take photos. Make mistakes. Learn as much as you can. All those things will help with your artwork. The important thing is to practice your art. It is also important to love art. Learning the computer tools will come later.